

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA – GREENSBORO

FALL 2010, HIS 239 / IGS 223

HISTORY OF COLONIAL LATIN AMERICA

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Welcome! This survey considers the origins of the diverse peoples and nations of what we today call “Latin America.” For over three hundred years, from 1492 to the mid-nineteenth century, men and women from four continents – all with their own languages, practices, and beliefs – converged, interacted, and intermixed (often violently) in the context of European colonialism. The result, as we will see, was a bewilderingly complex, eclectic, dynamic civilization. Thus, we will approach colonial Latin America – multiracial, multicultural, and economically globalized – as one of the world’s first “modern” societies.

In this sense, far from being a mere historical curiosity, we will learn that Latin America’s colonial peoples grappled with many of the same social, political, moral, and religious issues we read of in the news today. How, for example, can peoples of different cultures, faiths, and races live together peacefully? When is war (or rebellion) justified? Should authority be centralized, or is greater local autonomy the ideal? Finally, we should not forget that the history of Latin America is also *our* history. The United States, after all, is currently the world’s second-largest Spanish-speaking nation, and much of the country – including parts of North Carolina – was once part of Latin America.

TEXTS

This class requires heavy – but interesting! – reading. **All readings are mandatory.** In order to comprehend and follow the material, students will need to access the website and complete each week’s reading assignments *before* the corresponding lectures.

While a modern textbook – *Colonial Latin America*, by Mark Burkholder and Lyman Johnson – will guide us, we will focus on primary sources (that is, sources produced during the period we are studying) so as to emphasize the diverse perspectives of the men and women who lived in colonial Latin America and reflected on the people, events, practices, institutions, and conflicts of their own times. One collection of sources, *Children of God's Fire*, edited by Robert Conrad, contains many documents relating to the experience of African slaves and their descendants in Brazil. I will post the rest – as well as several maps and images – to the class website.

ATTENDANCE

The reading assignments supplement rather than replace my lectures, so attendance is essential to understanding the readings. Furthermore, I will present other information in class not covered in the readings, including visual materials, music, and video. Lectures will also provide opportunities for discussion, debate, activities, and questions. Therefore, **attendance is mandatory** and essential for performing well in the course.

CLASS WEBSITE

The website on Blackboard will play a major role. Besides the mandatory readings, I will also post study questions, links, announcements, and other materials that will help you perform well. Moreover, there will be several reading quizzes throughout the semester, all online. **You should check the website regularly for updates.** Occasionally, I will follow up on themes covered in lectures and discussions, and offer opportunities for extra credit by participation in online debate.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

Coursework includes the following: a short map quiz, identifying the countries of modern Latin America; a series of brief online quizzes based on the readings; a midterm, a short written response to specific questions (4-5 pages), and a final exam.

Map Quiz	10%
Reading quizzes	15%
Midterm	20%
Response paper	20%
Final exam	35%

STANDARDS AND POLICIES

As historians, your ability to write in clear and articulate prose is very important. I expect you to meet basic university writing standards, especially regarding spelling and grammar. Proofread and spell-check everything, as clarity and quality will affect your grade.

Take special care not to plagiarize – that is, to quote or paraphrase somebody else's words or ideas without crediting him or her. (If in doubt, ask!) I am happy to meet with you during office hours to go over your outlines and drafts and to answer any questions you have.

Online work will have clearly listed deadlines and parameters. **Written coursework is due in class on the day it is listed on the course calendar.** It should be double-spaced, in a readable and professional 12-pt font (such as Times New Roman), with 1-inch margins. (Do not mess with the margins; nothing could be more obvious.) Late work will be penalized one letter grade per day. In some circumstances I may be able to accommodate those with true conflicts and emergencies, but only if the student alerts me sooner rather than later.

CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE

In this course we will often discuss sensitive and emotionally charged topics, such as race, class, gender, and colonialism. While we will not always agree with one another, we welcome diverse interpretations of the material, as a discussion where everyone agrees is more of a pep rally than a classroom, and unlikely to be enlightening. We aim, therefore, to foster an atmosphere in which all students feel free to express their ideas, and in which we can disagree openly without feeling threatened or disrespected. To these ends, during class we will approach these issues as historians and scholars seeking truth, rather than as partisans with a specific agenda. Thus, **personal attacks and offensive language will not be tolerated**, since they obstruct honest debate.

A good rule to keep in mind: **when challenging another's arguments, try to do so in a way that assumes good faith on his or her part.** Address the strongest aspects of his or her arguments, not a cartoonish, over-simplified, and easily dismissed version of them. This rule has the added benefit of requiring each of us to think harder and question our own assumptions, and we all get smarter as a result.

Finally, **TURN OFF ALL CELL PHONES.** No texting. You may have drinks – but not food – in class.

Good luck and have a great semester!